

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

May 3, 2001

Contact: Patricia Patterson  
WSF Director of Public Affairs  
206-515-3410

## **Transportation Commission Approves Ferry Fare Increases Effective June 3**

(Olympia, WA) The Washington State Transportation Commission today approved its long debated proposal to increase ferry fares. The new fares will be effective June 3.

The average ferry rate increase under the proposal approved today is 20 percent. The Commission approved the ferry rate increase following legislative approval of a waiver to the Initiative 601 limits which otherwise hold government spending to a CPI-based growth factor. The waiver allows the ferry system to raise rates above the current 601 growth factor of 3.6 percent. These steps were required because the passage of Initiative 695 removed more than 20 percent of the operating funding and 75 percent of the capital funding for the ferry system.

"Since the passage of Initiative 695, the Transportation Commission has been very concerned about the financial basis for providing good ferry service," said Connie Niva, Chair of the Transportation Commission. "This first-year increase is dramatic and we realize that it will be welcomed by almost no one. But almost everyone will be relieved that it will allow us to continue needed service. And we pledge to re-visit and review the effect of ferry fare increases on ridership in the next 12 months."

The Blue Ribbon Commission on Transportation and the Legislature's Joint Task Force on Ferries concluded that ferry riders should play a bigger role in financing the ferry system.

Ferry fare increases were the subject of 14 public meetings conducted in February. During the meetings, Transportation Commissioners received comments from ferry riders on the proposal. Those comments led to changes from the original fare increase proposal including a reduction in the proposed hike in passenger-only fares.

Transportation Secretary Doug MacDonald thanked the Legislature and the Governor for the steps necessary to achieve the 601 waiver. He also credited the Commission and the groups that had recommended ferry fare increases for taking difficult but necessary positions.

“Fares have to be a key tool in meeting ferry system financial needs,” MacDonald said. “As we watch the debates in Olympia, all the proposals for the final state budget point to the need for the steps taken by the Commission today, and the sooner the better. Today’s steps will not and should not, however, end discussion about how ferry fare affordability can best be achieved in the future. That’s why the Commissioners’ pledge to keep the issue before them is so important.”

For passenger-only ferries, the Commission adopted a revised proposal that will have full-fare customers paying the regular Central Sound passenger fare of \$4.50 roundtrip (collected westbound) plus a \$1 surcharge collected each way. The cost for frequent user coupon books will be \$3.15 per roundtrip plus the \$1 surcharge each way. For convenience, the \$1 surcharge tickets will be available in books of 20 for \$20. They also will be sold individually from vending machines at the Bremerton, Vashon and Southworth terminals.

The average 20 percent fare increase will not fall evenly on every route. The commission’s new fares for the first time factor length of trip into the other variables traditionally used by the system in setting fares. The new methodology will be phased to cushion its impact on any particular route.

The Commission also decided that Washington State Ferries will not refund unused portions of coupon books that are purchased after June 2. Books purchased on or before June 2 still will be valid but only through July 7, even if originally stamped for later expiration. However, any unused portions either can be exchanged for a credit on new books or submitted for pro-rata refund until Sept. 1.

#####